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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000675

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: PROTEST ACTIVITY CONTINUES, BUT CITY IS NOTICEABLY
CALMER

REF: A. CONAKRY 0663
[1](#)B. CONAKRY 0668
[1](#)C. CONAKRY 0670

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Random protests continue in Conakry this morning, although the city appears calmer than it has since the civil disturbances started four days ago. Embassy has received reports of at least three dead, possibly four, and more than 40 injured. GoG security forces continue to respond with relative restraint, refraining from firing directly on protestors, although there have been reports of violent beatings. The situation in the interior of the country remains calm. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Interventions by the Minister of Security and the leaders of an ethnic youth group (Haal Pular) yesterday afternoon may have had a calming effect on at least some of the protestors who have been forcing the capital city to come to an almost complete standstill since November 2 (reftels). The city began to quiet down yesterday evening although there were still indications of unrest and general unease. Embassy employees coming to work this morning reported less evidence of possible protest activity, and many locally engaged staff were able to get to the Embassy safely. Vehicle traffic remained light, but there were more vehicles on the roads, including some taxis. Security forces were out, but there seemed to be fewer officers than witnessed earlier in the week.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Haal Pular youths and the NGO "Network of Friends for Life" organized an anti-violence march yesterday afternoon, encouraging protestors to end the demonstrations. The youth leaders reportedly told the protestors that they were "making the neighborhood look bad."

[1](#)4. (SBU) However, the situation remains tense. Two LES employees driving an Embassy vehicle were held up at gunpoint this morning at approximately 0330 by three armed men in camouflage uniforms. The employees were threatened and robbed, but physically unharmed. The Secretary General of the Ministry of Security told DCM that the ministry would investigate the incident.

[1](#)5. (SBU) By 0930, Embassy began receiving confirmed reports of protest activity, including tire burning, in Donka (near the CMR) and in Cosa. The Donka protest was reportedly kicked off by local high school students who were angry that their teachers had not reported to work for the third day in a row. Specific details about the Cosa demonstration were not available, but the area has consistently been a hotbed of protest activity over the last few days.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Although difficult to confirm, available information suggests that there have been at least three deaths since the protests began, possibly four. The Deputy Director of Donka Hospital (Conakry's largest hospital) told

Econ LES yesterday that the hospital was treating about 40 people who had been injured by bullets and/or rocks. However, when Econ LES called for an update today, the doctor (who is a government employee) angrily told him to stop calling because the hospital cannot provide a daily update. He said that when the crisis is over, the hospital would inform the general public through a press conference. (COMMENT. The GoG almost never publicly reports casualty totals, and certainly did not do so after similar recent crises such as the May military mutiny and the 2006 strikes. The GoG did provide an official casualty total from the 2007 strikes, but only after significant international and domestic pressure to do so. END COMMENT.)

¶7. (SBU) Recent international press reports have suggested that the GoG is responding to the crisis with undue force, possibly violating basic human rights. Although past practices support this claim, sources indicate that the security forces have been responding with relative restraint. They have been firing into the air, but Embassy has not received any reports to date of security forces firing directly at protestors. However, there have been numerous reports of security forces violently beating protestors. At the same time, many of the injuries appear to be the result of the protestors' activities. At least one of those killed was a police recruit and there have been reports of security forces sustaining injuries.

¶8. (SBU) Although some contacts suggest that the Minister of Security's intervention helped calm the situation, others indicate that many protestors remain undeterred. One participant told Econ LES that the minister had brought some

CONAKRY 00000675 002 OF 002

cattle as a peace offering, slaughtering them on the spot, and then offering the meat to the protestors as a gift of encouragement to return to their homes. The youths reportedly turned down the offer claiming that the meat would only give them indigestion, and then urinated on it. Another youth contact told Poloff that people are getting tired and hungry, especially since it is becoming increasingly difficult to buy food, which may force a temporary return to calm. However, contact emphasized that people remain deeply frustrated and are unlikely to back down in the long term.

¶9. (SBU) Some contacts have told Embassy staff that there is less protest activity today because many youths stayed up late to watch the results of the U.S. presidential election and then celebrate Senator Barack Obama's win. (COMMENT. Guineans have been following the U.S. elections very closely and there has been a high level of interest in the outcome. END COMMENT).

¶10. (SBU) Contacts throughout the interior of the country continue to report that the civil disturbances are confined to the capital area. However, they pointed out that there are now significant fuel shortages in Kindia, Boke, Labe, and Kankan. They added that the black market price for fuel now ranges between 10,000 GnF (\$2.08) and 20,000 (\$4.16) GnF per liter, as opposed to the official 5,500 GnF rate (\$1.15).

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) The situation seems calmer today, but there is still a high degree of uncertainty. If the civil disturbances continue, people are soon going to be affected by fuel shortages and lack of access to basic food supplies. These same shortages may in turn cause a ripple effect in the interior since many critical supplies transit Conakry, with imports (such as rice) going out to the interior, and locally produced agricultural products coming in. END COMMENT.

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